WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of automatically evaluating an image being processed in a photographic laboratory system which is operable to produce a plurality of different selectable forms of output, wherein said image is present in one of the forms of a physical image and of an image data set, and wherein the evaluation of said image serves to determine whether or not the image is of sufficient quality to merit processing into one of said forms of output, the method comprising the steps:

- determining grade values for each of one or more characteristic image properties,
- assigning target values to be met by the grade values relative to each of the one or more characteristic image properties and specific to each of said different forms of output,
- selecting one of said different forms of output, and
- comparing the grade values to the target values for the selected form of output.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein each of the grade values comprises a grading factor that is determined in accordance with a given reference scale for each of the one or

more characteristic image properties.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more characteristic image properties comprise at least one of sharpness, contrast, exposure light level, resolution, grain size, and percentage of a cut-off image portion

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said different forms of output comprise a first form of output of individual paper prints and a second form of output of index prints, and wherein the target value assigned for said second form of output for each of the one or more characteristic image properties is set so that in every case the image will be found of sufficient quality to merit processing into said second form of output.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the image is processed into the selected form of output only if the grade values meet the target values for all of the one or more characteristic image properties relative to the selected form of output.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

characteristic image properties comprise a plurality of characteristic image properties, and wherein the image is processed into the selected form of output only if a combined grade value for two or more of the characteristic image properties for the selected form of output meets a corresponding combined target value.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said different forms of output comprise a plurality of different output formats for paper prints.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said different forms of output comprise outputs produced by a plurality of different output devices.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein for a given characteristic image property and a given form of output, a different target value is set in different customer orders.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein said different forms of output include a digital output by writing the image data set into a data-carrier device, and wherein the target value assigned for said digital output for each of the one or

more characteristic image properties is set so that in every case the image will be found of sufficient quality to merit processing into said digital output.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the image data set and the grade values for each of the one or more characteristic image properties in a data-storage device prior to transmitting said image data set to an output device.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising at least one of the steps of

- generating said image data set by scanning said physical image,
- reading said image data set from a data-storage device, and
- receiving said image data set through a data interface,

wherein the image data set represents an input data set for said photographic processing system.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the grade values for the one or more characteristic image properties are determined from said input data set.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of performing at least one image correction on the input data set prior to determining the grade values for the one or more characteristic image properties